

Milpitas Coyote Solutions



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Natural History of Coyotes

Coyotes typically weigh 20-50 pounds and are similar to a tan-colored Shepherd-type dog. Native to the western two-thirds of North America, the coyote has expanded its range throughout the entire continent, largely due to the eradication of larger predators including wolves, cougars, and grizzly bears by humans.

Coyotes live in pairs or larger family units, or in small packs, and a strong social hierarchy generally limits reproduction to the group's leaders: the "alpha" mated pair. While loners exist, they are most often found in heavily hunted populations or when young males leave their pack.

Coyotes are predators, occupying the biological niche between foxes and wolves and as such play an integral role in their environment by helping to maintain natural ecosystems. Omnivorous by nature, coyotes feed on a wide variety of mammals, insects and fruit, though rodents, vegetation, and insects are generally their main food source.

Their intelligence and opportunistic feeding habits allow coyotes to survive, but it also puts them in conflict with humans, especially in agricultural regions, as well as in urban and suburban areas.

Historically, society has attempted to solve human/coyote conflicts, whether in agricultural regions and more recently in suburban areas, by killing them. Despite years of poisoning, trapping, neck snaring, and shooting coyotes, there are more of them in North America today than ever before.

Biologists have long recognized the role of coyotes in controlling rodent populations. A significant and growing body of research asserts that the presence of large carnivore species, such as coyote also preserves species diversity. One study in suburban San Diego found that by controlling the numbers of smaller carnivores, including grey fox, raccoon, striped skunk, opossum, and domestic cats in highly fragmented ecosystems, coyotes actually help preserve populations of native birds that would have otherwise been eaten by the smaller carnivores.

Why Milpitas?

Urban sprawl and habitat encroachment are the main reasons behind increased wild animal sightings and challenges. The loss of open space and natural habitat has decreased territories and disrupted predator-prey cycles. A reduction in natural food sources along with plentiful human provided alternatives have given deer, raccoons, opossums, squirrels, birds and coyote ample opportunity to flourish on unfamiliar diets.

The proximity of Milpitas borders and resides in natural habitat and ancient corridors. Wild animals don't differentiate between undeveloped land and developed land. Coyotes will migrate to areas that support them by offering food and shelter.

Coyotes are opportunistic feeders and have thrived on the ready source of human offered food in forms of unsecured food waste, bird feeders and the rodents they attract, healthy deer populations as well as unattended domestic pets.

Coyote Encounters

Since coyotes by nature are wary of humans they will avoid people whenever possible. If you encounter a coyote remember the following:

- Never feed or attempt to "tame" a coyote.
- Avoid direct eye contact.
- Do not turn your back or run from a coyote.
- Attempt to leave the area calmly.
- If followed by a coyote, make loud noises and make yourself look big. If this fails, throw rocks. Use super soakers (large-sized squirt guns).

Always keep yourself between the coyote and small children. Coyotes are not considered a disease threat. Outbreaks of rabies in coyotes are rare and they are not commonly implicated in the transmission of the disease to humans or domestic animals.

Detering Coyote

Coyotes are drawn to urban and suburban neighborhoods for two reasons: human encroachment into native habitat and the availability of food.

- Secure garbage cans by fastening lids with rope, bungee cords, or chains and tying the handle to a stake driven into the ground. Put garbage out the morning of pickup, not the night before.
- Dispose of especially attractive food wastes such as meat, cheese, and eggs by adding a small amount of ammonia to the bag to deter coyotes.
- When composting, use enclosed bins rather than exposed piles. Avoid adding dog or cat waste, meat, milk or eggs, and any food containing these products, to compost.
- If you have fruit trees, pick the ripe fruit and keep fallen fruit off the ground. Coyotes are fond of ripe fruit.
- Outdoor lights triggered by motion sensors can keep coyotes from approaching too close to your house at night.
- Clear away bushes and dense weeds near your home where coyotes find cover and animals to feed on.

Keeping Companion Animals Safe

Cats and small dogs could be seen as prey to the coyote, while larger dogs could be injured in a confrontation. To avoid these situations consider the following:

- Fence your property or yard. The fence must be at least six feet tall with the bottom extending at least six inches below the ground. Fences can be made more effective by outwardly inverting the top of the fence or by using electric fencing along the top and bottom.
- Keep animals in at night (coyotes are active both during the day and at night, but under cover of darkness, might be more likely to attack a pet.)
- If you allow your cats to go outside unattended and there is little or no natural tree cover, you can help protect your cat by installing "cat posts." Cat posts can be any type of long climbable wooden post (4x4 or corner posts) that stands out of the ground at least six to eight feet with a platform on top for the cat to rest on. The post will provide the cat with an opportunity to escape from a pursuing coyote.
- Don't leave pet food outside.
- Vaccinate your animals (*transmission of disease from coyotes to domestic animals is extremely rare*).
- Spay or neuter your dogs. Coyotes are attracted to, and can mate with, unsplayed or unneutered domestic dogs. Male coyotes will be attracted to unsplayed female dogs and unneutered male dogs could be lured away by an ovulating female coyote and be killed by male coyotes.

Safeguarding Other Animals

Coyotes are primarily rodent eaters and scavengers (rodents comprise 90% of coyotes' diets). However, they can harm or kill animals kept outside such as chickens, rabbits, goats and sheep. To reduce the risk to outside animals, take the following precautions:

- Keep animals within a fenced area. The fence must be wire mesh and at least six feet tall with the bottom extending at least six inches below the ground. Electric fencing with five to nine strands is also very effective in deterring coyotes.
- Keep animals closed in a secure shelter at night (coyotes can be active at night).
- Fright devices, such as sirens and sensor lights, may help deter coyotes from closely approaching animal housing areas.
- Use guard animals. Llamas, donkeys, and special guard dogs have proved effective in reducing or eliminating coyote predation of pastured animals.
- Provide rabbits with a wire-covered enclosure with fencing buried below the ground. Provide an escape shelter with an opening just small enough for the rabbit to enter. (*Cages are not recommended because rabbits may be attacked through the cage or die of stress as they frantically try to find cover.*)